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Brief to Minister of Education

on Payment of Government Grants to School Boards
in Event of School Closure Due to Lockout or Strike Action

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We thank you for this opportunity to meet with you on short notice on a matter which we deem to be of extremely critical importance.

In a letter dated June 29 to your predecessor, the grave concern of the Provincial Executive Council of The Alberta Teachers' Association was expressed that provisions of the School Foundation Program Fund enabled school boards to continue to receive payments from the fund, even though schools might be closed by lockout or strike action. We expressed the view that there was considerable evidence that the closing of schools was not a sufficient inducement to school boards to ensure bargaining in good faith. We noted that some trustees had, either facetiously or otherwise, expressed the opinion that a teacher strike was an excellent way to balance their budget and thus to negate any salary gains which might be accorded teachers in a settlement.

Alberta teachers have always been acutely aware of both the deleterious effects on the education of students and of the financial

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costs of strike action. They have therefore used strike action sparingly and only when all other avenues had been explored and had failed. It is our belief that strike action and lockout are theoretically acceptable alternatives in collective bargaining because they place pressure on both employers and employees to compromise in order to achieve collective agreements. The Association, therefore, has never provided full restitution for loss of salary to teachers on strike, nor has it automatically given strike support to bargaining units except when a school board has rejected an award of a conciliation board. Continued payments in full from the foundation fund during school closure, for strike or lockout, however, tend to relieve the pressure referred to above as far as school boards are concerned.

It seems obvious that grants are paid from provincial funds to provide a basic minimum educational program. School boards, which are creatures of the government, should not be permitted to gain political advantage through depressing the mill rate or producing budgetary surpluses with moneys gained at the expense of the education of students.

It is this rationale which convinced your predecessors to enact Order-in-Council 1193 of July 6, which authorizes the Minister to withhold a percentage of the grant in the case of school closure due to lockout or strike action. It is our firm belief that the previous government intended to use this order-in-council, as required, to encourage collective bargaining beyond the point where it might have otherwise ceased.

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The Provincial Executive Council, at a meeting on October 22, instructed its officers to urge the present government to employ the provisions of this order-in-council in the case of the strike which occurred in the North Central (West) School Authorities Association and in other strikes or lockouts which might occur in the province in the future.

This delegation, therefore, urges you to take the necessary action immediately to balance the pressures for bargaining in good faith on both sides of the current teacher-school authorities disputes. We hope that this might be the additional move which will prevent further unnecessary strikes which are harmful to the education of Alberta children, the morale of the teaching staff and the well-being of the educational system.

Respectfully submitted,

THE ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Edmonton, November 9, 1971